



DR. WALTER B. JAMES

OBITUARY NOTICES

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The medical profession of New York suffers a great loss by the death of Dr. Walter B. James.

Dr. James was born in Baltimore, May 5, 1858, and died in New York, April 6, 1927. He graduated from Yale College in 1879, and after studying biology for a year at Johns Hopkins University he entered the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York, from which he graduated in 1883. He had his medical training in Roosevelt Hospital and supplemented it by two years in the clinics of famous internists of Austria and Germany, and in the laboratories of Virchow and Koch.

He began to practice in New York in 1886. His professional life was closely identified with two institutions: the Medical College of Columbia University and The New York Academy of Medicine, and he was in succession attending physician to Bellevue, Roosevelt and Presbyterian Hospitals.

In Columbia University Medical School he passed from Clinical Lecturer in 1892 to Professor of Practice of Medicine in 1902. He filled the latter position nine years, and then resigned to become Professor of Clinical Medicine, which he remained until 1918. He was one of the most active members of the New York State Hospital Development Commission which was established in 1915, was the first Chairman of the State Commission for Mental Defectives following its creation in 1918, served for a number of years as President of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, and was a leading member and advisor of the New York State Committee on Mental Hygiene of the State Charities Aid Association. During the latter years of his life he served Columbia University as Trustee.

Dr. James was elected a Fellow of the Academy in 1889. He was Vice-President, 1912-1914, President, 1915-1918, and Trustee since 1919. He served the Council continuously from 1912 to the time of his death. He was deeply concerned with the Academy's material and spiritual prosperity and he spared no strength or sacrifice to promote its projects and promises. During his Presidency the entire program for the stated meetings fell upon him; so many of his colleagues were absent in the War. These

programs were replete with practical subjects whose chief aims were to aid, enlighten and encourage the general practitioner. In the Council of the Academy he was always conservative in his suggestions for safeguarding the Academy's funds, but radical in his views about membership. He thought that any honest, intelligent, dignified, serious member of the medical profession should be eligible for membership and thus be benefited by the educational advantages of the institution.

In Walter Belknap James, heart and mind blended to produce a lovable personality; in action they constituted the ideal physician. But he was more than a great doctor; he was an adornment to the scientific and social life of his period, a good citizen, a perfect friend.

He would have gone to the top in any walk of life, for he had ability, insight, imagination, energy and charm; and he loved his fellow-men. He loved them theoretically, practically, individually, collectively. He liked to be with them, to orient them, comfort them, encourage them to live, abjure them to love, teach them to die. I never heard him sit in adverse judgment upon a colleague; I never heard him speak ill of anyone in public or in private life, and he could see loveliness in character more universally than any man I have ever known. He could translate with ease and mastery a passion out of one breast into another and divide a sorrow out of itself. He knew how to boost the weary and burdened as they strove to mount the hills of life and to carry the wounded and feeble through the valleys.

I never knew him to divide himself from any man upon the difference of an opinion, or to be angry with his judgment for not agreeing with him; though he had respect of authority and was ever ready to use the civility of the knee, self-reliance was the corner-stone of the Esculapian temple which he erected and which adorned and served New York for more than thirty years.

He was an easy person to take from and a most difficult one to give to. I never went to him in pain, predicament or prejudice without getting relief, light and delivery. Hundreds could give similar testimony and would welcome the opportunity.

He was prodigal to lavishment of his strength, his possessions and his gifts. His patients, his profession, his fellow-beings concerned him always, himself, never. His career as practitioner, consultant, professor, president and trustee attests it. He was

a champion of truth and by birth and training was fitted to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity. Though he was born into riches, and it was his fate to be wealthy, it neither hampered the freedom of his mind nor the frankness of his disposition.

He had an investigating turn of mind; his perceptions were keen, his apperceptions vigorous, his intuitions swift, his judgments sound. His original bent was for pure science, but his herd-urge drove him to medicine. Early in his career he came under the influence of three great physicians: the first a Master of the Science of medicine, the second of the Art, the third of the Amenities. He became the devoted friend and successor of Francis Delafield, William Draper and Edward Trudeau.

He was at the apogee of his career and not far beyond fifty when the symptoms of the disease to which he finally yielded first showed themselves. He confronted them with courage and equanimity and these possessions served him to the last moment. He never let them interfere at any time with what he considered to be his duty and his privilege: to serve man and to promote the welfare of physicians. As the evening approached when he should never sleep again but wake forever, he displayed as little apprehension and concern as Socrates did when told that the hemlock awaited him.

He believed in God's eternity and in His wisdom, and his conduct was consonant with his belief. The motto of his soul was "Service." Service to those who were beholden to him; to the enfeebled and infirm; to those who were seeking instruction that would fit them to combat disease; to the community, and to all eager for enlightenment and desirous to give earnest of their health and wealth.

His mind was stored with poetry, his heart was filled with kindness, his purse was always in need of replenishment. He had one obsession: to help others; one ambition: to circulate the book of knowledge; one determination: to make life pleasanter for his patients and friends, saner for his contemporaries and successors.

He is survived by Mrs. James, who was Helen G. Jennings; a son, Oliver, Deputy Attorney-General of New York State; two daughters, Mrs. Henry H. Anderson and Mrs. Henry E. Coe, Jr., and several grandchildren.

JOSEPH COLLINS